

# War games

Miles Copeland

*The Ultra Secret* F. W. Winterbotham (Weidenfeld and Nicolson £3.25)  
*Spy Counter-Spy* Dusko Popov (Weidenfeld and Nicolson £3.75)

As everybody knows, we Americans are more cunning and resourceful, and less inhibited by moral considerations, than our British cousins. We are therefore to be forgiven if we believed, as we landed in Britain upon entering World War Two, that among our first duties would be the introduction of new life, techniques and outlook to the outmoded British intelligence services.

My own specialities were spying and counter-spying - with emphasis on the latter because, as our 'G-2' put it, "We must clean up Britain's security mess before we can use the place as a base for our own operations." My contribution to cleaning up the mess was the

arrest, on July 16, 1942, of a seedy little man whom my girlfriend had overheard in a nearby room in her boarding house "making funny tap-tap noises" and who had later accosted her on the staircase to make improper advances in a German accent. With the aid of another officer, Frank Kearns, now a well-known CBS newscaster, I swept into the man's room to find him tapping out Morse-coded five-letter groups on a wireless set. A real German spy.

Having no better ideas, Kearns and I marched the man straight into the front entrance of 20 Grosvenor Square, headquarters of American forces in Europe, and took him to the fifth floor to beat a confession out of him. Since half the military population of London had seen our arrival, however - at eleven o'clock on a Monday morning, in a taxi, with Kearns holding the man in a half-nelson as I carried his huge wireless transmitter - word of the arrest reached MI6's counter-espionage branch, Section V, in minutes. Before our interrogation had passed the preliminaries a red-faced British colonel was on our doorstep demanding custody of the prisoner, and our scalps.

Our captive, it turned out, was already under surveillance by Scotland Yard's Special Branch, and was shortly to have been picked up quietly in a way that would have led to his being 'turned' - i.e. converted into a 'controlled agent' sending his spymasters in Berlin only such information as it suited the British High

Command for them to have. Our precipitate action could have blown the possibility. Before the Anglo-American 'joint intelligence sub-committee' got around to calling us off there were several more such incidents, at God-knows-what cost to "Deception."

So it went, throughout the early days of the war - in our espionage, 'black' propaganda, sabotage, and guerrilla operations. We Americans bumbled about Britain launching out on what we thought were new tactics, only to have it brought home to us that the British had been there already and that we were muddying the waters. We did, however, have a number of purely American operations which did us proud - anyway, we got barrelsful of decorations and commendations for them.

was our "gaming," the process by which carefully briefed American officers imagined themselves in the shoes of members of the German General Staff and "gamed out" how they would react to the various alternative moves our own General Staff were contemplating.

For not always acting on our results, we thought our commanders fools and incompetents. Eventually, though, we were told that they knew exactly what intelligence the Germans were acting upon - for the simple reason that it was they who had furnished it, through the "double X" operation which John Masterman revealed to the public thirty years later in his *Cross Double-Cross*. We were not told, however, that our General Staff officers also knew what counter-moves the Germans were in fact about to make, because they were reading the Germans' top secret orders - often before their own commanders in the field were reading them. Only some twenty-odd American officers had access to this fact. The rest of us, despite our 'top secret' security clearances, went through the war judging our commanders as we saw them - usually with not very flattering conclusions, except that, mysteriously, their actions more often than not turned out to have been the right ones.

Now, thirty years later, we know the truth. From Group Captain F. W. Winterbotham's *The Ultra Secret* we learn how a single code-breaking operation was so successful that much of our other intelligence activities - spying, aerial reconnaissance, interrogation of prisoners, and all the rest - was superfluous; one might even suspect that it was tolerated by our commanders merely to camouflage the existence of their real source of information. Ultra. Lord Gort scurried to Dunkirk because, thanks to Ultra, he knew of Von Rundstedt's coming encirclement, not because he had 'estimates' based on reconnaissance and spy reports. The highly praised strategy of Dowding during the Battle of Britain was not so much clever 'game playing' as the result of knowing, thanks to Ultra, the day-to-day intentions of the Luftwaffe. Our generals easily outmanoeuvred Rommel in Africa because Ultra had given them precise information on his most critical problem, supply.

The book, let us hope, will give pause to those American experts on intelligence matters whose books have been cluttering up bookstores of late. The authors, most of them disgruntled former intelligence officers whose relations with the various major intelligence services are roughly what mine were with Allied intelligence during World War II, were high enough in their command hierarchies to have access to routine 'top secret' information, but were not among the very few who have clearances to the 1974 equivalent of Ultra. Perhaps the appearance of Fred Winterbotham's book will remind the public that we will have to wait thirty years before we can read the real story behind the story of 'Phoenix' in Viet Nam, the CIA's so-called 'secret army' in Laos, and the overthrow of Allende in Chile.

Meanwhile, I suggest that the die-hards curl

SOC 401.2 The ULTRA

Secret

P. Winterbotham, F.W.

Craigunder Copeland

SOC 401.2

Spy / Counter-spy